

When there was a real consensus of all the parishioners together, payment, he said, might be refused. He did not wish that * each parishioner should, whenever he would, hold from his parson by his own judgment/ but he considered that the combination of a whole neighbourhood was a useful protest against a bad priest or the evils of appropriation.¹ In this question, and this question only, Wycliffe definitely lays himself open to the charge of instigating men to lawless action. There must sometimes have been unfortunate applications of this crude remedy. All will feel sympathy for Chaucer's poor parson, who thinks that it is not for him to * cursen for his tithe/ and so prefers to go without it. On the other hand, it sometimes happened that the agitation to refuse payment was stirred up by the vicar himself, who saw his pittance being swallowed by some absentee incumbent or some neighbouring monastery. During the riots of 1381 several cases occurred of vicars heading their parishioners' onslaught against those who had appropriated the tithe of the parish.²

One cause of frequent reproach against the parish clergy was the result of the bad law framed for them by their superiors, rather than of their own peculiar wickedness. In the earlier middle ages the secular clergy had had wives. The Saxon priests had known no rule of celibacy. About the time of the Conquest, Hildebrand's dreaded decree began to find its way into England, and by the fourteenth century it had been a long-established rule that no priest should marry. But the old custom had never died out completely among the parish clergy, although their partners were now in the eye of the law mere concubines. The church authorities were often bribed to neglect visitation and inquiry into such cases, and priests brought up their children without, four, if not without reproach.³ Sometimes, indeed, the law of Celibacy drove the clergy into more irregular and even permanent unions; * but in this age of vice and coarseness, when all writers agree that incontinence was the prevailing sin of the laity, it was the

» *S. E. W.* iii. 177; *Matt.* 182; *S. E. W.*,
 11809; *Wilkins*, m. 241, art. 53.
 Beville, Ap. II. docs. 150-1, 200, 203;
 Oulman's tofer, H, 5KJU-7*
 * *Mot. Parl.*, iL S18-4; *S. B. W.** 9. ili. 163 j K Pl. A, in.
 * wood, 9ii, *Constitutiones Otjwbon**
 Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, 629-80, Ske&t; P, PL, C, vIL 866-7,